

Susan K. Mitchell

In the following excerpt, Mitchell considers the significance of Holden Caulfield being an unreliable narrator.

In the work, Holden has analyzed his family as a representative slice of society and has concluded that adult society is phony and corrupt. But can we really trust his observations of his family after he has told us that he lies? Is he not, like the Cretan who declared that all Cretans were liars, a person declaring that all people are phony? If everyone is phony, then he is phony, too! Although Holden has claimed that he is a liar, he does not always realize whether he is lying or telling the truth. The distinctions between truth and falsehood become blurred as he often adds the phrase "to tell you the truth" onto whatever he is saying. But does this catch phrase ensure that his words are any more truthful? This unambiguous rhetorical statement is restated in an even more paradoxical way when Holden tells Sally that he loves her and then comments to the reader, "It was a lie, of course, but the thing is, I *meant* it when I said it." Again we are forced to read the work, as de Man suggests [in his essay "Semiology and Rhetoric," appearing in *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, edited by Robert C. Davis, 1986], in "two entirely coherent but entirely incompatible" ways. Is he lying, or does he "mean" it? First we may claim that Holden is telling the truth: he is a liar, people are phony, society is corrupt. Or we may claim that Holden is lying: he is truthful, people are genuine, and society is untainted.

There are obvious problems with both sides of this paradox. Can Holden, people, and society be entirely unchanging—always lying, always corrupt, always phony? Or are there internal forces within each that cause them to change (un)willingly? Holden would argue that each is unchanging, labeled forever. In fact, this is how he presents his information to us. He may go out with Sally, but he does not harbor any hope that she will cast off her phoniness. He may loan Stradlater his coat, but he still believes Stradlater is a phony.

Because we view all of the events in the book through the eyes of one narrator, our observations Page 131 | [Top of Article](#) are necessarily biased. Holden is an unreliable narrator not only because he is a self-proclaimed liar but also because he perceives reality in a simplistic way. In his work *S/Z* [1974], Roland Barthes outlines two ways of perceiving reality: *readerly* and *writerly*. Barthes explains these ideas in terms of reading books. He claims that the only way to read a different story is to reread the same book. By rereading, a person can learn how this book differs from itself rather than how it differs from other books. When a reader rereads a work, he is perceiving writerly. When a reader refuses to reread, Barthes maintains that he is condemned to "read the same story everywhere." Holden refuses to reread as he perceives reality readerly, seeing only the surface differences between people, not the underlying differences within each person. To perceive a person readerly would be to perceive in terms of overt, easily distinguishable differences.

Because Holden avoids investigating deeply, he sees the same story everywhere. Everyone is phony, he insists. But can we honestly believe him? Is he telling the truth? Even so, he is not passing on false or limited information since he has not gone to the trouble to read one story well. To approach accuracy, Holden would have to perceive a person writerly, to judge the fragmentation, the differences within the person, the covert, often contradictory intentions that

war within and cause overt actions. We can draw conclusions only from the data which Holden perceives and selects to reveal to us (and he does select carefully as when he refuses to discuss his childhood or his parents); hence, we must be astute readers indeed lest we miss the multidimensionality of the characters that he develops. His readerly perception creates blinkers for the reader.

Throughout the novel, Holden tries to lull us into accepting his view of surrounding life as he makes statements that seem to make sense, but which, upon closer inspection, do not bear up to a writerly view. This simplistic mode of perception is revealed particularly through his description of his family. First of all, the Caulfield parents are described in such a way as to cause the blinkered reader to view them uncompromisingly as irresponsible, alienated, skittish parents. For example, the parents are off at work away from their children, who are scattered throughout the country: D. B. in Hollywood, Allie dead, Phoebe at home, and Holden at Pencey Prep. Mr. and Mrs. Caulfield seem to be isolated characters. The reader never meets Mr. Caulfield and only hears Mrs. Caulfield when Holden is hiding in Phoebe's room. Holden will not tell much about his parents beyond his veiled opinion that they both are phony hypocrites. The reader is not even told their first names. From the beginning we are led to believe that they are hypersensitive about Holden's revealing their personal life because they want to protect their created image of conformed perfection. Because Mrs. Caulfield is a nervous woman who has smoked compulsively ever since Allie's death, Holden avoids confrontation about his being kicked out of Pencey Prep. He therefore hides from her as he stays in a hotel or in Mr. Antolini's apartment. Each of these examples appears to show that Mrs. Caulfield does not really communicate with her children. On the other hand, Mr. Caulfield is a lawyer. Holden makes no bones about his opinion of lawyers: they "make a lot of dough and play golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hot-shot" and are phony but can't know it.

Holden's warped view of his parents denigrates them without even considering that the Caulfields may be blameless. Can we really trust Holden's view of his parents? Isn't he unethically stacking the deck so that we are prohibited from obtaining an objective view of them? We are given so few facts and scenes to describe them that we have trouble refuting Holden, except that we know he is holding something back from us. No couple could merit such a denunciation from a son. If what he has revealed about the Caulfields is true, carefully selected though the information may be, can we blame them for their anger, hysteria, and desire for privacy? These would be logical reactions if an offspring were so apathetic as to be kicked out of several reputable schools and then became anxious to write a book about his family while recovering from insanity. And what is wrong about working hard to support children, to enable them to have the best education possible? What exactly is phony about being a lawyer? Even though Holden's vagueness works well for him, making his parents appear base, mercenary, isolated, distant, and careless, it denies any redeeming qualities that would upset Holden's persuasive thesis that adult society is corrupt.

According to Holden, D. B. represents wholehearted acceptance of society's norms. In Holden's caustic terms, D. B. is a "prostitute" who lives in Hollywood, where he makes buckets of money producing popular movies, such as the Annapolis love story, which might prevent him from joining the family at Christmas. D. B. appears to symbolize the successful all-American man since he lives in Hollywood, Page 132 | [Top of Article](#) one of the most prestigious areas of the

country, displays a noticeable sign of wealth by owning a Jaguar, and has a "good-looking" albeit affected English girlfriend. However, D. B.'s own name is revealing of both society's worst qualities and his embracing of its values. Like many of the movies that he is writing, D. B.'s name is abbreviated, easy to remember, and void of significant meaning. The very fact that D. B.'s name is compressed into two initials makes one wonder what lies behind them. Just as his name used to mean something, he used to have something to say. But now as D. B. apparently bows to society's pressure and to his desire to pursue the American Dream, he loses the meaning in his life and therefore cannot communicate the message he once had, the message he once published in his short story, "The Secret Goldfish," one of Holden's favorites.

After being bombarded with these loaded examples of D. B.'s phoniness, we must ask certain questions to reveal whether Holden is right to condemn his brother. For instance, we should ask why it is wrong to display signs of wealth. Don't the signs reveal a truth about D. B.—that he is indeed wealthy? Also, does his meaningless name necessarily mean that he has no message of truth and beauty? D. B. is actually an unselfish, caring brother, as demonstrated by his numerous visits ("practically every week") with a recovering Holden. He does have other commitments, a girlfriend and work, that do keep him from devoting himself wholeheartedly to his immediate family; it is to his credit that he finds as much time as he does to visit his family. However, to prove his thesis, Holden holds fast, emphasizing that because D. B. has rejected an accepted art form and taken up the mass media that a technological society promotes, he has become visibly corrupt. But what is so corrupt about writing movies? Is it the medium that makes the difference? Can paper itself be any more artistic than celluloid? And is Holden really as against movies as he claims to be? If so, why does he volunteer to see so many? By seeing movies, Holden embraces that which he says he rejects. Although he distinguishes between "good" movies and "lousy" movies, he still claims that they are all phony. But what is the difference between a good movie and a good book? Holden does not answer our question. He doesn't follow his proclaimed norms; he is phony.

In Holden's readerly view, Allie represents immunity from the dangers of society. Allie is dead, escaped from the clutches of a culture that ultimately requires that children give up their innocence and individuality. Fascinated with Allie's solution to the problem, Holden defies him, preserving him in his memory by carrying Allie's uniquely poem-laden baseball mitt, praying aloud to him, and remembering his good-natured innocence. At the beginning of the novel, Allie is Holden's ally, his closest friend and kin. Holden *wants* to ally himself with Allie, to lie down, subside, become extinct, to simply leave this corrupted Eden. Throughout the novel, Holden contemplates physical death in innumerable scenes, such as when he writes about Egyptian mummies in his history class, when he asks what the ducks do during winter, and when he remembers the suicide of James Castle.

However, does he want to unite himself with Allie because Allie truly is perfectly pure, or simply to assuage free-floating feelings of guilt associated with Allie's death? His guilt seems to arise primarily from an incident that occurred when Allie was alive. Holden and a friend decided to have a picnic and shoot their BB guns, and Allie wanted to go with them. However, Holden called him a child and would not let him come along. Now that Allie is dead, whenever Holden gets depressed, he does penance, telling Allie out loud, "Okay. Go home and get your bike and meet me in front of Bobby's house. Hurry up." Holden's recurring feelings of guilt distort his

(and our) image of Allie. Did Holden refuse to allow Allie to join him on the expedition because Allie was not perfect? Looking back on the incident, Holden states, "[Allie] didn't get sore about it—he never got sore about anything—but I keep thinking about it anyway, when I get very depressed." Or was Holden the guilty party by refusing without a good reason to allow Allie to come along? In his guilt, Holden paints Allie larger than life.

Phoebus, the name of Apollo, means the genius of poetry. This association is not lost on Phoebe as she writes a synthesized gothic-detective thriller in which her protagonist, Hazle Weatherfield, is an orphan detective who has a father. Holden believes that Phoebe is also an orphan who has parents, but because they are alienated, they do not offer the example, guidance, and support that true parents should. Of course Holden proves this neglect as he chooses to tell us that although Phoebe is to play Benedict Arnold in "A Christmas Pageant for Americans," her father plans to fly to California on that day anyway. Also, her mother, instead of lecturing Phoebe when she admits to smoking, simply closes the subject with the irrelevant question "Do you want another blanket?" Because Phoebe is still young and alive, Holden transfers Page 133 | [Top of Article](#) many of his guilt feelings about Allie to her, causing her to grow, in Holden's perception, more and more innocent and uncorrupted. She trusts Holden wholly as she gives him her Christmas money and packs a suitcase to run away with him. In spite of his guilt over Allie, he commits the same guilt-inducing act with Phoebe as he refuses to allow her to accompany him on the new expedition.

As pure as Holden makes Phoebe appear, she has a wisdom that belies her years. She shrewdly sees through Holden's facade of well-being, realizing that he doesn't like anything. When she tests him to prove her theory, he cannot name anything "really" that he likes. She is also a very literate young lady. She is able to identify Holden's song as belonging to Robert Bum's poem and to correct the miswording in it. She perceives reality writerly, as shown when she writes the same story over and over again. When her mother smells smoke and assumes that Phoebe has been smoking cigarettes, Phoebe is too quick—she, like Holden, lies about the truth, saying that she only took one puff of the cigarette when it was actually Holden who had been smoking. Again, when Mrs. Caulfield complains of a headache, Phoebe promptly supplies the remedy: "Take a few aspirins." Does Phoebe's covert wisdom support Holden's premise that society is corrupt? Does the thesis prove truer than he wants it to be? Holden wants to hold out for children, to proclaim their Edenic innocence. However, his flawed readerly perception blinds him to the writerly truth: not all is as easily categorizable as it appears.

Naturally, Holden is the only character shown to be heroically struggling with exactly how to relate to society. He is locked into a self that desires to be genuine but finds no way to return to the pastoral ideal. He believes that he is holed in, trapped by the games of phoniness that society requires its citizens to play. He tries to escape this trap by flunking out of school and by searching for a quiet retreat, only to discover that there is no pure retreat on earth—log cabins are distant and lonely, deserted museum rooms are corrupted with permanent obscenities, private hotel rooms lure prostitutes and pimps. Frustrated by the readerly evidence which he has gathered to support his thesis, Holden is himself fragmented and ravaged by the warring forces within him. For instance, within Holden, the desire to reject others conflicts with the desire to be accepted by others; he doesn't want to lend Stradlater his coat, but his overt actions belie this covert, warring want; he despises Ackley, but he invites him to see a movie; he hates movies,

believing them to foster phoniness in society, but during the three days of the book he sees or talks about several; he craves truth, but he tells blatant lies. Despite his own inherent writerliness or differences within, Holden still perceives only readerly. He views himself as a liar, but he refuses to acknowledge that this means that he is phony, too....

What does this mean for us? What is Salinger trying to prove? Perhaps by making Holden unreliably readerly, he is saying that society is both phony and necessary. Holden's unreliability forces us to question everything about the subject: Holden's view, society's view, our own view as readers. The apparently stable themes are radically unstable; Holden does change, and society can, too, for society is neither entirely phony nor wholly pastoral. Instead, it is both one and the other. It cannot be placed in a fixed category since it is writerly.

[Although some critics believe] that there is a coherent, knowable meaning of a work, they refuse to analyze why the meaning varies so radically from one critic to the next. Of course, some of them would rationalize that one critic may not be as intelligent or educated as another. This is possible but does not really answer the fundamental question satisfactorily. Therefore the meaning is ultimately undecidable. Since this is a writerly text, a text that splits down the middle into positive and negative factions, the ultimate meaning of it is undecidable. The reader's expectations of having an orderly, coherent world of meaning are unraveled by the thread that holds the work together. Salinger places his story *en abyme*, to use [J. Hillis] Miller's term [as quoted from "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure, II," in *Georgia Review*, 1976], so that it becomes undecidable. Society now appears genuine, now phony, now genuine again, and so on endlessly. There is an endless freeplay of meaning because the book lacks a genuine center—the apparent center of the book is actually phony. Therefore, the meaning of *The Catcher in the Rye* can never be totalized.

Source: Susan K. Mitchell, "To Tell You the Truth..." in *CLA Journal*, Vol. 36, No. 2, December, 1992, pp. 145-56.

Jonathan Baumbach

In the following excerpt, Baumbach explores the meaning of "innocence" in The Catcher in the Rye.

J. D. Salinger's first and only novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), has undergone in recent years a steady if overinsistent devaluation. The more it becomes academically respectable, the Page 134 | [Top of Article](#) more it becomes fair game for those critics who are self-sworn to expose every manifestation of what seems to them a chronic disparity between appearance and reality. It is critical child's play to find fault with Salinger's novel. Anyone can see that the prose is mannered (the pejorative word for stylized); no one actually talks like its first-person hero Holden Caulfield. Moreover, we are told that Holden, as poor little rich boy, is too precocious and specialized an adolescent for his plight to have larger-than-prepschool significance. The novel is sentimental; it loads the deck for Holden and against the adult world; the small but corrupt group that Holden encounters is not representative enough to permit Salinger his inclusive judgments about the species. Holden's relationship to his family is not explored: we meet his sister Phoebe, who is a younger version of himself, but his father never appears, and his

mother exists in the novel only as another voice from a dark room. Finally, what is Holden (or Salinger) protesting against but the ineluctability of growing up, of having to assume the prerogatives and responsibilities of manhood? Despite these objections to the novel, *Catcher in the Rye* will endure both because it has life and because it is a significantly original work, full of insights into at least the particular truth of Holden's existence. Within the limited terms of its vision, Salinger's small book is an extraordinary achievement; it is, if such a distinction is meaningful, an important minor novel.

Like all of Salinger's fiction, *Catcher in the Rye* is not only about innocence, it is actively for innocence—as if retaining one's childness were an existential possibility. The metaphor of the title—Holden's fantasy-vision of standing in front of a cliff and protecting playing children from falling (Falling)—is, despite the impossibility of its realization, the only positive action affirmed in the novel. It is, in Salinger's Manichean universe of child angels and adult "phonies," the only moral alternative—otherwise all is corruption. Since it is spiritually as well as physically impossible to prevent the Fall, Salinger's idealistic heroes are doomed either to suicide (Seymour) or insanity (Holden, Sergeant X) or mysticism (Franny), the ways of sainthood, or to moral dissolution (Eloise, D. B., Mr. Antolini), the way of the world. In Salinger's finely honed prose, at once idiomatically real and poetically stylized, we get the terms of Holden's ideal adult occupation:

Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and *catch* them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy.

Apparently Holden's wish is purely selfless. What he wants, in effect, is to be a saint—the protector and savior of innocence. But what he also wants, for he is still one of the running children himself, is that someone prevent *his* fall. This is his paradox: he must leave innocence to protect innocence. At sixteen, he is ready to shed his innocence and move like Adam into the fallen adult world, but he resists because those no longer innocent seem to him foolish as well as corrupt. In a sense, then, he is looking for an exemplar, a wise-good father whose example will justify his own initiation into manhood. Before Holden can become a catcher in the rye, he must find another catcher in the rye to show him how it is done.

Immediately after Holden announces his "crazy" ambition to Phoebe, he calls up one of his former teachers, Mr. Antolini, who is both intelligent and kind—a potential catcher in the rye.

He was the one that finally picked up that boy that jumped out of the window I told you about, James Castle. Old Mr. Antolini felt his pulse and all, and then he took off his coat and put it over James Castle and carried him all the way over to the infirmary.

Though Mr. Antolini is sympathetic because "he didn't even give a damn if his coat got all bloody," the incident is symbolic of the teacher's failure as a catcher in the rye. For all his good intentions, he was unable to catch James Castle or prevent his fall; he could only pick him up

after he had died. The episode of the suicide is one of the looming shadows darkening Holden's world; Holden seeks out Antolini because he hopes that the gentle teacher—the substitute father—will "pick him up" before he is irrevocably fallen. Holden's real quest throughout the novel is for a spiritual father (an innocent adult). He calls Antolini after all the other fathers of his world have failed him, including his real father, whose existence in the novel is represented solely by Phoebe's childish reiteration of "Daddy's going to kill you." The fathers in Salinger's child's-eye world do not catch falling boys—who have been thrown out of prep school—but "kill" them. Antolini represents Holden's last chance to find a catcher-father. But his inability to save Holden has been prophesied in his failure to save James Castle; the episode of Castie's death provides an anticipatory parallel to Antolini's unwitting destruction of Holden.

That Antolini's kindness to Holden is motivated in part by a homosexual interest, though it comes as a shock to Holden, does not wholly surprise the reader. Many of the biographical details that Salinger has revealed about him through Holden imply this possibility. For example, that he has an older and unattractive wife whom he makes a great show of kissing in public is highly suggestive; yet the discovery itself—Holden wakes to find Antolini sitting beside him and caressing his head—has considerable impact. We experience a kind of shock of recognition, the more intense for its having been anticipated. The scene has added power because Antolini is, for the most part, a good man, whose interest in Holden is genuine as well as perverted. His advice to Holden is apparently well-intentioned. Though many of his recommendations are cleverly articulated platitudes, Antolini evinces a prophetic insight when he tells Holden, "I have a feeling that you're riding for some kind of a terrible, terrible fall"; one suspects, however, that to some extent he is talking about himself. Ironically, Antolini becomes the agent of his "terrible, terrible fall" by violating Holden's image of him, by becoming a false father. Having lost his respect for Antolini as a man, Holden rejects him as an authority; as far as Holden is concerned, Antolini's example denies the import of his words. His disillusionment with Antolini, who had seemed to be the sought-for, wise-good father, comes as the most intense of a long line of disenchantments; it is the final straw that breaks Holden. It is the equivalent of the loss of God. The world, devoid of good fathers (authorities), becomes a soul-destroying chaos in which his survival is possible only through withdrawal into childhood, into fantasy, into psychosis....

Obliquely searching for good in the adult world, or at least something to mitigate his despair, Holden is continually confronted with the absence of good. On his arrival in the city, he is disturbed because his cabdriver is corrupt and unsociable and, worst of all, unable to answer Holden's obsessional question: where do the Central Park ducks go when the lake freezes over? What Holden really wants to know is whether there is a benevolent authority that takes care of ducks. If there is one for ducks, it follows that there may be one for people as well. Holden's quest for a wise and benevolent authority, then, is essentially a search for a God-principle. However, none of the adults in Holden's world has any true answers for him. When he checks into a hotel room, he is depressed by the fact that the bellboy is an old man ("What a gorgeous job for a guy around sixty-five years old"). As sensitized recorder of the moral vibrations of his world, Holden suffers the indignity of the aged bellhop's situation for him, as he had suffered for Spencer's guilt and Ackley's self-loathing. Yet, and this is part of his tragedy, he is an impotent saint, unable either to redeem the fallen or to prevent their fall....

After his disillusionment with Antolini, who is the most destructive of Holden's fathers because he is seemingly the most benevolent, Holden suffers an emotional breakdown. His flight from Antolini's house, like his previous flights from school and from the hotel, is an attempt to escape evil. The three are parallel experiences, except that Holden is less sure of the justness of his third flight and wonders if he has not misjudged his otherwise sympathetic teacher.

And the more I thought about it, the more depressed I got. I mean I started thinking maybe I *should've* gone back to his house. Maybe he *was* only patting my head just for the hell of it. The more I thought about it, though, the more depressed and screwed up about it I got.

The ambivalence of his response racks him. If he has misjudged Antolini, he has wronged not only his teacher, but he has wronged himself as well; he, not Antolini, has been guilty of corruption. Consequently, he suffers both for Antolini and for himself. Holden's guilt-ridden despair manifests itself in nausea and in an intense sense of physical illbeing, as if he carries the whole awful corruption of the city inside him. Walking aimlessly through the Christmas-decorated city, Holden experiences "the terrible, terrible fall" that Antolini had prophesied for him.

Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again. Boy, did it scare me. You can't imagine. I started sweating like a bastard—my whole shirt and underwear and everything.... Every time I'd get to the end of a block I'd make believe I was talking to my brother Allie. I'd say to him, "Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie." And then when I'd reach the other side of the street without disappearing, I'd *thank* him.

Like Franny's prayer to Jesus in one of Salinger's later stories, Holden's prayer to Allie is not so much an act of anguish as an act of love, though it is in part both. Trapped in an interior hell, Holden seeks redemption, not by formal appeal to God or Jesus, who have in the Christmas season Page 136 | [Top of Article](#) been falsified and commercialized, but by praying to his saint-brother who in his goodness had God in him.

Like so many heroes of contemporary fiction—Morris' Boyd, Ellison's Invisible Man, Malamud's Frank, Salinger's Seymour—Holden is an impotent savior. Because he can neither save his evil world nor live in it as it is, he retreats into fantasy—into childhood. He decides to become a deafmute, to live alone in an isolated cabin, to commit a kind of symbolic suicide. It is an unrealizable fantasy, but a death wish nevertheless. However, Holden's social conscience forces him out of spiritual retirement. When he discovers an obscenity scrawled on one of the walls of Phoebe's school, he rubs it out with his hand to protect the innocence of the children. For the moment he is a successful catcher in the rye. But then he discovers another such notice, "*scratched* on, with a knife or something," and then another. He realizes that he cannot possibly erase all the scribbled obscenities in the world, that he cannot catch all the children, that evil is ineradicable.

This is the final disillusionment. Dizzy with his terrible awareness, Holden insults Phoebe when she insists on running away with him. In his vision of despair, he sees Phoebe's irrevocable doom

as well as his own, and for a moment he hates her as he hates himself—as he hates the world. Once he has hurt her, however, he realizes the commitment that his love for her imposes on him; if he is to assuage her pain, he must continue to live in the world. When she kisses him as a token of forgiveness and love and, as if in consequence, it begins to rain, Holden, bathed by the rain, is purified—in a sense, redeemed.

A too literal reading of Holden's divulgence that he is telling the story from some kind of rest home has led to a misinterpretation of the end of the novel. Holden is always less insane than his world. The last scene, in which Holden, suffused with happiness, sits in the rain and watches Phoebe ride on the merry-go-round, is indicative not of his crack-up, as has been assumed, but of his redemption. Whereas all the adults in his world have failed him (and he, a butter-fingered catcher in the rye, has failed them), a ten-year-old girl saves him—becomes his catcher. Love is the redemptive grace. Phoebe replaces Jane, the loss of whom had initiated Holden's despair, flight, and quest for experience as salvation. Holden's pure communion with Phoebe may be construed as a reversion to childlike innocence, but this is the only way to redemption in Salinger's world—there is no other good. Innocence is all. Love is innocence.

The last scene, with Holden drenched in Scott Fitzgerald's all-absolving rain, seems unashamedly sentimental. Certainly Salinger overstates the spiritually curative powers of children; innocence can be destructive as well as redemptive. Yet Salinger's view of the universe, in which all adults (even the most apparently decent) are corrupt and consequently destructive, is bleak and somewhat terrifying. Since growing up in the real world is tragic, in Salinger's ideal world time must be stopped to prevent the loss of childhood, to salvage the remnants of innocence. At one point in the novel, Holden wishes that life were as changeless and pure as the exhibitions under glass cases in the Museum of Natural History. This explains, in part, Holden's ecstasy in the rain at the close of the novel. In watching Phoebe go round and round on the carrousel, in effect going nowhere, he sees her in the timeless continuum of art on the verge of changing, yet unchanging, forever safe, forever loving, forever innocent.

Source: Jonathan Baumbach, "The Saint as a Young Man: A Reappraisal of *The Catcher in the Rye*," in *Modern Language Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4, December, 1964, pp. 461–72.